

Lesson Unit 9: Continuity or Rebirth

Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to

- Explain the Buddhist concept of continuity (rebirth) while rejecting the existence of a permanent self.
- Explain how and why rebirth takes place in three realms of existence.
- Explain the concept of rebirth based on the original sources
- Quote from the discourses in defining rebirth and continuity

Student Activities:

- Read each of the Readings/notes carefully and underline/ highlight the key words and concepts.
- Draw a mind-map around the main topic linking the key words and concepts that you have underlined or highlighted in the readings/notes showing their relationship to the main topic and also to each other
- Read the given original sources to be familiar with the texts
- Listen to the two YouTube presentations on the concept of karma and rebirth and write down your comments on them (a paragraph)

For your journal entries, write detailed accounts on the following: *gandhabba*, rebirth, stream of consciousness, cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*), *bhava*.

Reading: No to Identity, Yes to Continuity

The Buddha declares the continuity of living beings. "Action is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture which lead to the rebirth of a being" (AN I, 223). However, the Buddha accepts the continuity while denying the identity of an individual being. There is no permanent, immutable, and immortal soul that lies within the individual. This denial of identity does not imply the denial of continuity. What continues are the constantly changing processes. The doctrines of impermanence, causation and continuity are connected, consistent and harmonious.

Human person is conditioned by various factors. He is composed of the psycho-physical personality. Six elements – earth, water, fire, air, space, consciousness – and five aggregates – material form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness – come to form him or her.

The human personality is conditioned and provided with an identity by the dispositions. Human society, its culture and civilization are all dominated by the dispositions. When human dispositions dominate the human individual as well as the human society, we have kamma functioning at the level of both the individual and the society. Therefore, my intention and our collective intentions create this world. Our bodily, verbal and mental actions build the world.

Conditions for Conception

Three factors are necessary for the birth of a being (MN I, 266): Coitus of the parents, the mother being in the proper season to conceive, and the presence of a *Gandhabba/Vi-n-naan.a*. The first two conditions produce *Gabba*, that is, the fetus formed in the mother's womb. Conception becomes complete with the influence from a surviving consciousness.

The Mahanidana sutta (D II, 62) states that if consciousness were to not enter the mother's womb, the psycho-physical personality would not be constituted. If it were to leave the womb after some time, the psycho-physical personality would not go to maturity. Fetus formed in the mother's womb has to be influenced by a surviving consciousness.

Psycho-physical body is conditioned by consciousness and the consciousness is conditioned by the psycho-physical body. It is consciousness that serves as a connecting link between two lives. As the D III 105 has it, the person who has extrasensory perception can see a person's unbroken flux of consciousness established both in this world and the next. Stream of consciousness (*vi-n-nana-sota*) is the stream of becoming (*bhava-sota*). This stream of consciousness is not completely severed (*abbocchinna*) at the two extremities but established in this world and in the next.

No theory of disembodied existence

Can the Consciousness survive without psychophysical personality? No mention of this consciousness surviving even for a moment without the support of a psycho-physical personality. Consciousness survives only if established in a new *nama-rūpa* personality. Continuity is maintained on the basis of the psychic personality.

Knowledge of one's past is possible for consciousness depends upon memory (*sati*). Consciousness is conditioned by dispositions. Consciousness is a stream or a flux (*sota*). Knowledge of one's past (retro-cognition) follows in the wake of memory (D II, 134).

Consciousness functioning in the wake of memory (*satanusari*) enables a person to have knowledge of the past. Consciousness is the conveyor of the information of the past.

Arahant and Consciousness

The consciousness of the enlightened one/ arahant finds no support in a new psycho-physical personality because he has no craving for existence (SN I, 122). Therefore, *natthi dani punabbhavo* – no rebirth for him.

Watching and Listening

Watch and listen to Daya Sirisena on the Buddhist concept of Rebirth

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZAg3IG2ZcM

Karma and Rebirth in Theravāda Buddhism by Brian Ruhe

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xC41hpd0_X0

Lecture Notes

Arahant – No Rebirth

The arahant has abandoned the round of births that brings renewed becoming (*ponobhaviko jātisamsāro*), has cut it off at the root ... so that it is no longer subject to future arising. M I, 139

There is no future round for manifestation (*va.t.ta.m tesam. natthi pa-n-naapanaaya*) in the case of those who are arahants with taints destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being/becoming, and are completely liberated through final knowledge. M I, 141

Non-returners

Those who have abandoned the five lower fetters are all due to reappear spontaneously in the Pure Abodes and there attain final Nibbāna, without ever returning from that world.

Once-returners

Those who have abandoned the three lower fetters and attenuated lust, hate, and delusion are all once-returners, returning once to this world to make an end of suffering.

Stream-enterers

Those who have abandoned three fetters are all stream-enterers, no longer subject to perdition, bound for deliverance and headed for enlightenment.

To enlightenment

Those who are Dhamma-followers or faith-followers are all headed for enlightenment.

To heaven

Those who have sufficient faith in me, sufficient love for me, are all headed for heaven.

Samsāra

The round of flow, circulation, continuation

The round of rebirths (samsāro) has its origin in eternity: "It is impossible to find any beginning from which beings steeped in ignorance and bound up by the thirst (for existence) wander aimlessly from rebirth to rebirth (samdhāvatam *samsāratam*)."

(SN II, 179)

This circulation occurs throughout the five destinies (*panca-gati*) and the threefold world (*tayo bhava*)

The Three-fold World where earthly humans may be reborn are:

Kaama-dhaatu: the world of sensual desire, or of the five senses, which includes the destinies of the hells, animals, departed spirits, humans, and some of the gods (the six classes of gods of the world of desire)

Ruupa-dhaatu: the world of form, which includes heavenly beings who have been reborn into the world of Brahmā and who are distributed throughout the spheres of the four jhānas (trance states)

- **Aruupa-dhaatu:** the world of formless, which includes heavenly beings who have been reborn, in the shape of a "mental series", in the spheres of the four attainments (*samaapatti*).

These spheres consists of

- the sphere of unlimited space
- the sphere of unlimited consciousness
- the sphere of nothingness

the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception = summit of existence

- The Five Destinies or the life forms concerned with man are:

- the hellish beings
- the animals
- the departed spirits
- humans

the gods

- Human Population (SN II 262)

Buddha asked his monks: "Which is greater – the little bit of sand on my fingernail, or the great earth?" "Lord, great by far is the great earth. Tiny is the sand on your fingernail. The two cannot be compared." "So too, beings who are born as humans are few in number. Far greater are those who are reborn in non-human realms. Therefore, you should train yourself, thinking: 'we will live earnestly.'"

From Mahasihanada Sutta (MN 12)

Four kinds of generation:

- Egg-born generation – the beings born by breaking out of the shell of an egg
- Womb-born generation – the beings born by breaking out from the caul
- Moisture-born generation – the beings born in a rotten fish, in a rotten corpse, in rotten dough, in a cesspit, or in a sewer

Spontaneous generation – gods and denizens of hell and certain human beings and some beings in the lower world

Two Views on Rebirth

The eternalist doctrine holds that this present, existing person will survive after death, will continue, will go on more or less intact, to take up residence here or there in the future.

The annihilationist doctrine holds that this present, existing person will be annihilated at death – destroyed, wiped out, obliterated – and there will be no future existence of any kind.

When the Buddha is asked questions about death and rebirth, he does not side either with eternalism or with annihilationism. Instead, he expounds the deep and subtle doctrine of dependent co-Arising.

All living beings are dependently arisen; they exist and change as patterns of conditions dependent upon other conditions. Life does indeed go on from one existence to another, but it is not identical life – it is just the natural consequence or outcome of what has gone before.

How does human life come to be?

Many factors contribute to the birth of a human being.

Birth or entry into a womb is due to, at least, three factors: the union of the parents; mother being in the proper season; and the availability of a surviving consciousness (*gandhabbo paccupatthito hoti; viññāṇassa okkanti*)

Four nutriments for the subsistence of beings who have come to be and for the benefit of those who are looking for survival: gross food for the physical body; contact for sensory experience; intention of mind for human initiative; consciousness for the continuity of life within one life span as well as in survival.

For this reason, consciousness is called `stream of consciousness (viññāṇasota), for such a stream is necessary to account for the continuity of a personality within one life as well as in re-becoming.

Therefore, this stream of consciousness is not completely severed (abbocchinna) at the two extremities but established in this world and in the next.

Consciousness also functions in accounting for knowledge pertaining to the past time (atitam addhanam). This is when consciousness functions in the wake of memory (satanusari). The memory associated with consciousness constitute the psychic personality or the stream of becoming (bhavasota) which is supported by the nutriments (ahāra).

The content of this memory is referred to in the descriptions of retrocognition (pubbenivasanussati). The memory relating to the previous life provides the information that the person has such and such name, such and such lineage, such and such color, such and such food, such and such experiences of happiness and suffering and such and such life-span.

But, none of the above memories from the past contributes to the determination of the nature of the present life. One may remember that one was a priest in a previous life, but that does not mean that one is going to be a priest in the next. The memory of being a member of a certain clan or certain country does not mean that one's future is determined by such membership.

The future life will depend on dispositions which provide an individuality to the stream of consciousness (sankhārapaccaya viññāṇam), when dispositions tie up the individual to his or her behavior.

Thus, human beings have deeds as their own, deeds as their inheritance, deeds as their womb, deeds as their kin, and deeds as their refuge. It is deed that distinguishes human persons into low and sweet.

The source of knowledge of something is different from the way that thing works.

Thus, while memory serves as the only source of knowledge on the basis of which one can talk of rebirth or re-becoming, the mechanism involved in such rebirth or the conditions that determine a carryover of such a personality is volitional behavior.

The genuine personality is the lump of dispositions, not its accidental associations such as clan, caste, or country.

Even though, for the purpose of inculcating morality, the Buddha spoke of deeds of a previous life, he discouraged the pursuit of the past, especially for the sake of discovering one's past status.

Both the thought of birth (jativakka) and talk of birth (jativada) are defilements.

The Buddha recognized rebirth or re-becoming through two forms of knowledge: retrocognition and the knowledge of the survival of other beings.

The Buddha was able to remember some of his previous lives and also observe the survival of other beings at the moment of their deaths.

Consciousness plays a primary role in survival. Unless consciousness finds a footing in a womb or a psychophysical personality, there could not be survival.

Birth is not the absolute beginning of life and death is not the absolute end of life.

The first origin of a life process (*saṃsāra*) is not conceivable.

The Buddha was also not prepared to admit that every person who dies is necessarily reborn. There is no way by which one can guarantee that the conditions for survival will be available.

If the conditions are available, then a person can survive death.

The strongest of dispositions to survive death will not produce the conditions necessary for its survival; it could only utilize the conditions if they are available.

For these conditions include not only one's disposition to survive, but also external conditions such as the union of the parents and the mother being in her fertile season, that is, the availability of a fertile womb or a new psychophysical personality.

There can be survival, but it is conditional.

Unless a person develops the higher forms of knowledge (retrocognition, clairvoyance) which enable a person to remember incidents of the past and perceive the survival of other beings, it would not be easy to convince oneself of other validity of the doctrines of karma and rebirth.

Hence they could not be used as arguments for convincing the ordinary people of the need to follow a moral life.

The Buddha utilized the karma and rebirth as a wager to encourage and instigate the ordinary people to adopt a moral life.

Herein, householders, an intelligent person reflects thus: `If there is no world beyond, this morally bad individual, at the break up of the body after death will be safe. However, if there were to be a world beyond, this worthy individual, at the breakup of the body, after death, will be reborn in purgatory, evil destiny, fallen state, hell.

Let it be that there is no world beyond, yet this person in this very life will earn the contempt of the intelligent ones: "This person is of bad virtues, of confused views, is nihilistic."

However, if here were to be a world beyond, then this person will face calamity in both ways: the contempt of the intelligent ones in this life and, after death, rebirth in purgatory, evil destiny, fallen state, hell.

Again and again, the dairy folk draw milk;
Again and again, the calf goes to its mother;
Again and again, one wearies and trembles;

Again and again, the fool enters the womb;

Again and again, one is born and dies;
Again and again, they take one to the cemetery.
But when one has obtained the path
That leads to no more renewed existence,
Having become broad in wisdom,
One is not born again and again!

Samyuttanikāya 7:12

From the Original Sources

From the Mahatanhasankhaya-sutta

- A Buddhist monk called Sāti had the following wrong view: "According to the Dhamma taught by the Buddha, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths."
- Finding about it the Buddha questioned the monk: "What is that consciousness?"

- **The monk:** "Venerable sir, it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions."
- **Buddha:** "You idiot, to whom have you ever known me to teach the Dhamma in that way? In many discourses have I not stated consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness?"
- Then the Buddha addressed the monks and introduced the sixfold consciousness that arise conditioned by the sense organs and the sensory objects:
- "Monks, consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises.
- When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness.
- When consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds, it is reckoned as ear-consciousness.
- When consciousness arises dependent on the nose and odours, it is reckoned as nose-consciousness.
- When consciousness arises dependent on the tongue and flavours, it is reckoned as tongue-consciousness.
- When consciousness arises dependent on the body and tangibles, it is reckoned as body-consciousness.

When consciousness arises dependent on the mind and mind-objects, it is reckoned as mind-consciousness.

- **Buddha:** Monks, do you see: "This (e.g., consciousness) has come to be?"
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, do you see: "Its origination occurs with that (e.g. senses and sensory objects) as nutriment?"
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, do you see: "With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation"

Monks: Yes, venerable sir.

- **Buddha:** Monks, does doubt arise when one is uncertain thus: 'Has this (e.g., consciousness) come to be or not?'
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, does doubt arise when one is uncertain thus: Does its origination occur with that (e.g., senses and sensory objects) as nutriment or not?
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, does doubt arise when one is uncertain thus: With the cessation of that nutriment, is what has come to be subject to cessation or not?

Monks: Yes, venerable sir.

- **Buddha:** Monks, is doubt abandoned in one who sees as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This (e.g., consciousness) has come to be?'
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, is doubt abandoned in one who sees as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'Its origination occurs with that (e.g., senses and sensory objects) as nutriment?'
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, is doubt abandoned in one who sees as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation?'

Monks: Yes, venerable sir.

- **Buddha:** Monks, are you free from doubt here: `This (e.g., consciousness) has come to be?
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, are you free from doubt here: `Its origination occurs with that (e.g., senses and sensory objects) as nutriment?
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, are you free from doubt here: `With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation?
- **Monks:** yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, has it been seen well by you as it has actually been with proper wisdom thus: This (e.g., consciousness) has come to be?
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, has it been seen well by you as it has actually been with proper wisdom thus: `Its origination occurs with that (e.g., senses and sensory objects) as nutriment?
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, has it been seen well by you as it has actually been with proper wisdom thus: `With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation?
- **Monks:** Yes, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, purified and bright as this view is, if you adhere to it, cherish it, treasure it, and treat it as a possession, would you then understand the Dhamma that has been taught as similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping?
- **Monks:** No, venerable sir.
- **Buddha:** Monks, purified and bright as this view is, if you do not adhere to it, cherish it, treasure it, and treat it as a possession, would you then understand the Dhamma that has been taught as similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping?

Monks: Yes, venerable sir.

- **Buddha:** Monks, there are these **four kinds of nutriment** for the maintenance of beings that already have come to be and for the support of those seeking a new existence. What four? They are:
- solid or liquid material food
- contact
- mental volition consciousness.
- Now, monks,

These **four kinds of nutriment have craving as their source**, craving as their **origin**; they are **born and produced from craving**.

Craving has feeling as its source, feeling as its origin; it is born and produced from feeling.

Feeling has contact as its source...

- Contact has the sixfold sense base as its source ...
- This sixfold sense base has mentality-materiality as its source ...
- Mentality-materiality has consciousness as its source ...
- Consciousness has formations as its source ...

Formations have ignorance as their source, ignorance as their origin; they are born and produced from ignorance.

So, monks, with ignorance as condition, formations come to be; with formations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality as condition, the sixfold sense base; with the sixfold sense base as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, being; with being as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

M I, 54 (Right View Sutta):

There are these six classes of consciousness

With the arising of formations there is the arising of consciousness.

With the cessation of formations, there is the cessation of consciousness.

The way leading to the cessation of consciousness is just the Noble Eightfold Path.

Buddha: "Good, monks. So you say thus, and I also say thus: **When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises.** That is with ignorance as condition, formations come to be; with formations as Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

- But with the remainder-less fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of formations; with the cessation of formations, cessation of consciousness Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

The monks confirmed their understanding by stating that "Ageing and death cease with the cessation of birth; with the cessation of birth, cessation of ageing and death

Buddha: Good, monks. So you say thus, and I also say thus: **'When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.'** That is, with the cessation of ignorance comes cessation of formations; with the cessation of ...

- Monks, knowing and seeing in this way, would you run back to the past thus: 'Were we in the past? Were we not in the past? What were we in the past? How were we in the past? Having been what, what did we become in the past?'

Monks: No, venerable sir.

- **Buddha:** Knowing and seeing in this way, would you run forward to the future thus: Shall we be in the future? Shall we not be in the future? What shall we be in the future? How shall we be in the future? Having been what, what shall we become in the future?

Monks: No, venerable sir.

- **Buddha:** Knowing and seeing in this way, would you now be inwardly perplexed about the present thus: Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?

Monks: No, venerable sir.

- Monks, the conception of an embryo in a womb takes place through the union of three things.

- Here, there is the union of the mother and father, but it is not the mother's season, and the being to be reborn is not present – in this case there is no conception of an embryo in a womb.

Here, there is the union of the mother and father, and it is the mother's season, but the being to be reborn is not present – in this case too there is no conception of an embryo in a womb.

But when there is the union of the mother and father, and it is the mother's season, and the being to be reborn is present – through the union of these three things the conception of an embryo in a womb takes place.

The mother then carries the embryo in her womb for nine or ten months with much anxiety, as a heavy burden. Then, at the end of nine or ten months, the mother gives birth with much anxiety, as a heavy burden. Then, when the child is born, she nourishes it with her own blood, for the mother's breast-milk is called blood in the Noble One's Discipline.

When he grows up and his faculties mature, the child plays at such games as toy ploughs, tipcat, somersaults, toy windmills, toy measures, toy cars, and a toy bow and arrow.

When he grows up and his faculties mature still further, the youth enjoys himself provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure, with forms cognizable by the eye ... sounds cognizable by the ear ... odours cognizable by the nose ... flavours cognizable by the tongue ... tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, connected with sensual desire, and provocative of lust.

On seeing a form with the eye, he lusts after it if it is pleasing; he dislikes it if it is unpleasing. He abides with mindfulness of the body un-established, with a limited mind, and he does not understand as it actually is the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder.

Engaged as he is in favouring and opposing, whatever feeling he feels – whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant – he delights in that feeling, welcomes it, and remains holding to it. As he does so, delight arises in him. Now delight in feelings is clinging. With his clinging as condition, being comes to be; with being as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

On hearing a sound with the ear ... repeat with the rest of the six.